

CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

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VOL. I.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you—JOHN xxiii. 34.

FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

ON THE PERSON OF CHRIST.

MR. EDITOR,

Having recently discovered the purport of the "Christian Messenger" to be the removal of those errors which have obscured the beauty and simplicity of Christianity, I feel encouraged to offer for it a few remarks which were committed to writing some time since for the satisfaction of an advocate for his divinity the principal result of which was his desire and that of others, to see them published in some periodical work.

The question under consideration, is whether Jesus was simply a man, and consequently only equal to the human race in point of nature, or, whether his person was divine, and possessed all the proper attributes of Deity.

It is said that some passages in Scripture, speak of Jesus, as being God, others as his being only man, hence his simple humanity, and real deity in one person have been inferred; but were this the case, the Scripture would surely support two opposite ideas; for nothing can be more dissimilar than proper deity and real humanity; between the two, how considerable is the difference, in knowledge, power, wisdom, and nature of existence? The former possesses *all* power, knowledge, and wisdom, and is infinitely supreme in nature: the latter, is allowedly greatly limited in these respects—the one is *perfect*, the other *imperfect*; the one *self-existed*, the other was *made* by that self-existence—the one is *unchangeable*, but Jesus grew in *stature and wisdom*, and was a man of sorrows. How then, can Christ be God? and by what reasoning can it be shown, that the two were so connected as to form but one being? If, indeed, such close connection existed, why should not the sorrow, and all the vicissitudes of the one, equally exist in the other? and then with what consistency could God be called immutable?

It is allowed God knows all things,

but Jesus said, of that day, and that hour, *I know not*. If Christ be Deity, or any part of the Godhead, how could he be *entirely ignorant* of what God *well knew*, especially if they were so connected as to form but one being?

It is also allowed, that God has all possible power, Christ said, God is greater than him, and that he could do nothing of himself; this remark is very plain, on the supposition that Christ and God are two distinct beings; but if they are only one being, how could *limited and unlimited power exist in that one being*? either the power of Christ was alone limited or unlimited; it was naturally impossible to be *both*. And if Christ, or any part of Christ, had only such power as he derived, does it not follow, that he, or that part of him, had not underived power, and therefore could not be God?

If Christ and God are only one being, where was the utility of his praying to God? would not this involve the absurdity of his praying to himself? and in this case, would not his prayers have been destitute of sincerity, and this his conduct, improper for our imitation?

Again, when Christ died, if Christ and God are identically one being, must not God have died? and during this period must not the whole frame of nature have been unsupported by, and independent of him? And if only one part of him actually died, how could *all* his parts be solely *one*? And if one part of him actually died, and the other did not, must not his parts be so far separated and distinct, as to exclude all idea of *oneness*? and if no such separation or distinction existed, the whole God must have died! But how could the only self-existent being, who possesses all power, be put out of existence? And even if this were the case, who, or what, could have brought him into existence again? And if Christ did not actually die, he surely could not have been raised from the dead. and if life was not totally extinct from him, he might naturally have raised

himself from the grave, (not to say from the dead;) and how can the resurrection of a God, who did not actually die, be any evidence of the resurrection of a man; and of a man too, who does actually die? And if Christ is God, as God is absolute perfection, by what means could he be exalted, as it is expressly said, that Christ was; or who could place him in a more elevated situation? And if God is infinite, by what means could he be reduced to a finite being, and how could he be both at the same time? or was it possible, that the *visible Christ* could be the *invisible Jehovah*? Would it not be as easy for light and darkness to exist at the same time in the same space?

I do not wonder that the advocates of the idea, that Jesus was more than a man, should admit as they generally do, that the idea is a *mystery*, which implies a thing not understood; they are quite consistent in this respect; but their inconsistency consists in pretending to believe it to be true, and to profess to feel satisfaction in supporting it as such, although compelled to acknowledge it as a point they do not comprehend.

If we take belief to be as it is, the assent of our minds to what we understand, or to what we conceive, we plainly discover, that as true as mystery is what is not understood, a similar assent thereto cannot be granted.

As a mystery is a thing entirely unknown, to say we know what is unknown would be a flat contradiction; and the pretence of believing what is unintelligible, is the same thing. It therefore appears certain, that we deceive ourselves, if we profess to give the assent of our minds to any proposition as true, when the truth of it is not comprehended.

But it is no less necessary to observe, that even if we could comply in believing in a mystery, this would not be of any moral advantage. Suppose, for example, the precept of Jesus, "Do unto others, as we would they should

do unto us," was incomprehensible; then what reason should we have for believing this precept to be true? or could we in this case, see its beauty, or feel its moral influence?*

To conclude, I reject the notion that Jesus was more than a man in person, for the following reasons;

1st. It is contrary to express declarations of Scripture, particularly his own declarations.

2dly. If he was God, it was useless and absurd for him to pray.

3dly. If a God, neither his praying, nor any other parts of his conduct would render him a proper pattern for our example; and that he should be such, was an essential object of his divine mission.

4thly. If Jesus was God, he could not have died, and if he did not die, our belief in a future state of existence, as founded on his death and resurrection is destroyed. In fine, I do not believe, that Jesus was more than a man, because such an idea is involved in inexplicable mystery,† is repugnant to the principal portion of Scripture, and the most natural ideas that can occur.—

Yours, &c.

A FRIEND TO TRUTH AND CONSISTENCY.

FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

MR. EDITOR,

It is with much pleasure, that I perceive you are adhering strictly to the prospectus of the Christian Messenger, and have kept the columns open for the use of every Christian Sect. Why should it be otherwise, unless it be to answer some sinister motive? If our brethren be in an error, should we not try to convince them, rather than take any

* As extreme cases will illustrate general principles, suppose the whole of the Scriptures from the beginning of Genesis, to the end of the revelation of John, were a mystery; i. e. altogether incomprehensible; would not the Bible printed in an unknown tongue be as advantageous to us in every respect, as the present English, or any other translation? If the thing itself is an inexplicable mystery, of what use is it to understand the language?

† To these remarks it may be objected that the Christian Religion is frequently called a mystery in the New Testament. This is admitted, but then it ought ever to be remembered, that it is uniformly represented as a mystery revealed. If there are any doctrines or writings in this sacred volume which have always been mysterious, then although they may be God's will, they are not his revealed will.

offence on that account? and by giving them an opportunity of defending what they believe to be true, they will be more likely to hear what may be said on both sides of the question; and if they should not be convinced, it would be well for us to inquire whether the cause of division may not be in ourselves; remembering that all have an equal right to listen to the divine testimony.

When people argue with warmth on religious subjects, it carries too much evidence, that their object is more to maintain and defend the belief of a sect, than to promote the honor and glory of God. The Spirit which manifested itself in those disciples, who would have called down fire from heaven, to consume those who would not receive their testimony, has been but too prevalent in all ages of Christianity; yet we have reason to thank God, that it seems to be subsiding; and it would be well if all such should receive the rebuke which Jesus gave his disciples, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." Luke ix. 54.

CANDOR.

Dialogue between a Universalist and a Limitarian.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 151.

Uni. I believe you are correct in this statement; for it is known by every one, who attends on the ministry of those who hold to the doctrine of endless misery, that they constantly hold up the idea, that as people leave this mortal state, so they must remain for ever afterward. I will proceed, therefore, to consider the subject of this inquiry, by calling several things in question which are necessarily involved in this general sentiment. Let us first ask the question, how it is known that the moral state of man in the future world is the same in which he leaves this? Secondly, let us ask, how it is known, that, allowing a man is in exactly the same moral condition after death, as before or at death, there is no possibility of his being changed from that state? It likewise belongs to this subject to ask, how it is known that man occupies a conscious, moral existence after the death of the body, before he is introduced into a state of immortality?

It is proper to remark, that these current notions, which ministers perpetually dwell on in their public communications, are believed to be passing among

men for truth, without ever being called in question. But this is not the way by which the knowledge of divine things can ever be obtained. Even truth, being only traditionally believed, is never so understood as to be of such moral advantage to the mind, as when we are able to give a reason for what we believe. Permit me, therefore, dear sir, to request you to furnish the evidence from the word of God, on which the fact inquired for in our first question is founded. Do you know of any passage that seems to have been designed to establish the fact, that man's moral existence and condition after death is necessarily the same as that in which he leaves the world?

Lim. Truly sir, I see no reason why you have not a right to call for the testimony on which every truth, which the scriptures support, is founded; for thereby the mind is exercised in associating the evidences in favour of whatever we profess to believe. But it is generally allowed that the whole tenor of divine revelation proceeds on this principle, that as we leave this world, so we must forever remain in the future. Yet, I do not, at this moment, recollect any passage directly on the subject. Where, if you recollect, is the text so often recited in sermons and in religious conversation? I think the words are the following: "As the tree falls so it lies; as death leaves us, so judgment must find us." I do not know that the scripture uses these very words, these words are generally used in sermons, and are so often repeated in conversation on this subject, that people generally suppose that they are so recorded in the Scriptures.

Uni. When I was young, I as much believed that the words you have now recited were the words of scripture as I believed any thing that I heard preached. But I have since satisfied my mind that there is no such passage in the Bible. This led me to be cautious respecting many other expressions which tradition has introduced and established in the minds of Christian people. By such means I have been led to ascertain that many errors in the church have their support from a set of phrases which are not found in the divine testimony. There is a passage in the 11th of Ecclesiastes, which speaks of the tree's being in the place where it falls, but there is no reason for supposing

that the author was speaking of the death of man. The following is the passage with its connexion; "Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days—Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth. If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth; and if the tree fall towards the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be. He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap." It seems perfectly easy to discover, in this passage, a signification of the natural effects which follow from certain causes; and whatever more than this an inventive mind might possibly discover in the meaning of the passage, it seems perfectly clear that the author was speaking nothing concerning the state in which men die, or of their moral state after death.

To be continued.

Christian Messenger.

Philadelphia, Saturday, May 13, 1820.

"MORAL AGENCY."

(Concluded.)

After quoting a few passages from the Review, with his comments upon them, the Christian adds,

"And according to the creed of this reviewer, since every man acts according to the will of God in a theocratic sense, He is 'as well pleased with the consequences of withholding' (grace) 'whenever it is withheld, as he is in bestowing, whenever it is bestowed;' and He 'who has it, at all times, in his power to be pleased, ought never to be [said, in the same sense of speaking, to be]* displeased.' Thus men are, in the opinion of this astonishing reviewer, in the moral scale equal, virtue and vice, rewards and punishments are superceded; and the Lord is equally pleased with sin, as with holiness."

Why does not the Christian show that the premises of the Universalist are incorrect, before he draws this unfavourable conclusion? It is not believed that the Universalist believes differently from the Christian on the subject above stated; and if not, we might put his faith to the same shipwreck that he has endeavoured to put ours. The question

is, can God be displeased with his own acts?—and if not, how can he be displeased with their legitimate consequences? It does not necessarily follow, that God is "pleased with sin," as such; yet he may be pleased that "the law entered that the offence might abound," not, however, for the sake of the offence, but that "where sin abounded, grace might much more abound."

The Christian continues,

"As the principles of this Universalist appear to be nefarious, beyond a parallel, so are they utterly without foundation. The theocratic or decreative purposes of Deity, are not rules of human conduct, they are known only by prophecy or events. The attempt therefore, to justify the wickedness of man, because it accomplishes the sovereign purposes of God, which are unknown to men, and not motives of their actions, is not only contrary to reason and justice, but a blasphemous denial of all that God has revealed, concerning his moral government, both by his word and the light of nature."

It would better become the Christian to prove the principles of the Universalist false, before he pronounces them "nefarious,"—i. e. *wicked, abominable*,—"beyond a parallel?" No attempt has been made by the Universalist, "to justify the wickedness of men, because it accomplishes the sovereign purposes of God." The conduct of Joseph's brethren was extremely wicked, notwithstanding the sovereign and good purposes of God. The conduct of the Jews towards Christ and his apostles, were no less wicked because they accomplished that which God in his allwise counsel had determined before to be done. Neither do we consider the Christian, or Dr. Ely,* any less wicked for trying to cast an odium on the Universalist, because God will overrule all such fruitless attempts for good! But could we trace any of this wicked conduct to Adam, as its cause, then we should say, that Adam, and Adam only, was guilty of all this wickedness, and that the immediate actors, (poor souls!) were altogether excusable! And even if we should not be able to trace this conduct, especially of C. and Dr. E., to Adam, yet if we may suppose that they have become so blinded by a false theory in religion, which has been handed down to them through the medium of creeds, and creed-makers, as to think that they are

really doing God service by fulminating *a wickedness and blasphemy*, against those whose principles they cannot prove false, then, even in this case, it ought to go a good way towards mitigating the crime, though not wholly to extenuate the offence. We therefore perfectly agree with the Christian, when he says,

"His (God's) rectoral will has been promulgated in his laws, which are the immutable rules of our conduct, to be regarded at our peril; and must be enforced in vindication of his justice and truth."

Nor are we any more disposed to differ with him in the following closing paragraph;

"And the allegation, that moral ability is natural to man, and his punishment therefore unjust, when it is clear as the meridian Sun, that it consists not in the defect of any of the essential constituents of his nature, but in the mere want of a heart, or inclination to good, must appear to every unprejudiced mind, an injurious arraignment of eternal rectitude, and an aggravating indignity offered to the Greatest, and the Best of Beings."

Now, if "moral ability is (not) natural to man," how can moral inability be natural to man? Yet the Christian has said, and which we must here again repeat, "Such is the strength of man's aversion to good, which, *since the fall, is natural to him*, that he never rightly chooses it, but by the aid of divine grace." This certainly implies that before the fall, man's aversion to good was not so strong, but that he might choose it without the aid of divine grace. Unless this is to be understood, and if divine grace were as necessary to good actions before the fall as since, then there has been no such thing as a fall. Hence, if the words of the Christian mean any thing, they mean that the moral inability of man to yield spiritual obedience to the divine law, is, since the fall, "NATURAL TO HIM." The whole of the Christian's arguments, therefore, are turned against himself; and they "must appear to every unprejudiced mind, an injurious arraignment of eternal rectitude, and an aggravating indignity offered to the Greatest, and the Best of Beings!"

Notwithstanding this is our view of the subject, yet this language, which the Christian designed for the Universalist, without the least qualification, without allowing even the possibility of an honest mistake, we are not disposed

* The words inclosed in brackets the Christian left out in his quotation; and we are willing to submit it to the public, whether this was either candid or honest.

* See Christian Messenger, No. 30.

to retort upon him. We believe the Christian to be pious and sincere, though like many others, labouring under strong prejudices, and following the bias of his particular creed.

If he will lay aside these, and will undertake to prove the truth of his hypothesis from Scripture testimony, we will pay all due attention to his communications, and shall endeavour to profit thereby: until which time, we bid him an affectionate adieu. K.

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BEAUTIFUL EXTRACT.

"And worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff."—Epistle to Hebrews.

It is a beautiful trait in the religion of the Bible, that as it is founded upon truth, it is supported by simplicity, and is altogether independent of human grandeur, altogether at variance with the dictates of human pride. In the history of the patriarchs, we are presented with a pure and undefiled religion, in its effects upon a people, who as yet, knew little of the refinements of society, at once striking, impressive and deeply interesting. Whether we consider Abraham as calling with confidence on the Most High in a strange land; or Isaac, as walking abroad to meditate at eventide; or Jacob, when, in the language of the apostle, he worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff; we are equally impressed with the beauty of that religion, which is thus seen to flourish, not amongst the most polished, but the most simple; not the most powerful, but the most obedient; not the most learned, but the most faithful of mankind. Thus we are taught to believe that however pomp and splendour may seem to add to the effect of religion, or however imposing the colouring which they throw around it, yet as its object is to unite man with his Creator, it cannot be assisted by human power; it needs not the aid of adventitious circumstances. It is not amidst the crowd of assembled multitudes, nor in "temples made with hands," that its effects are only to be felt.

He who pauses amid the labour of the day, or contemplates the beauties of nature at early dawn, or goes into the fields to meditate at eventide, or with Jacob, worships "leaning upon the top of his staff,"—may doubtless feel with its full force, the influence of a

spirit of devotion. It was thus, that the holy men of old were taught to trust in that Being, whose attributes are displayed in all his works; it is thus that pious men in every age, have learned to bow in deep humility, and with solemn reverence, before Him "who hath created the heavens, and the work of whose fingers the stars are;" and it is thus, that in our own minds may be inculcated lessons of piety and un murmuring obedience, that we may be taught to look upon the evils of this life as necessary preparatives to eternity, and every event as subservient to the holy purposes of a Being whose mercy endureth forever. We may thus, in youth, be preserved amid temptation; and in old age be enabled to look back with peace on our past lives; and with pious and grateful devotion, worship like the patriarch, "leaning upon the top of his staff."

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DEVOTION.

AMONG the many errors which have found their way into what is called religion, the views which seem to be entertained, by many, of DEVOTION and its necessity, have not been the least in depriving the pious of that rational and sublime enjoyment which is ever connected with pure devotion. Whoever supposes that our Creator requires certain acts of solemn worship, as something due to him, and an expense to the worshipper, which does not contribute to his own edification and comfort, certainly enjoys nothing by all the devotion he pays to the divine Being. When such people have hurried through their dry, unrefreshing rites, they may, and no doubt do feel as if a certain obligation was settled, a debt paid, or something done by way of merit for some expected advantage in future. But could the worshipper believe that all debts were forgiven, and all future necessities secured, he could find no use for all his devotion. Those who worship God in the way above described, say, if they could be persuaded to believe that our salvation was already secured in the favour and mercy of our heavenly Father, they could see no necessity in paying him any devotion, or religious homage whatever, or of giving the least heed to his divine requirements. Yea they go further and say, that it would be no matter what we should do; that it

would be as well to live impiously, and lead sinful lives, as to be ever so pious, and virtuous. Thus it is evident that devotion, to such people is a tax, a sort of penance, which they pay, not as the pure returns of gratitude for mercies constantly flowing from the giver of every good and perfect gift, but as a discount on their enjoyments which they are obliged to make in order to secure the remainder.

But did we realize the unchangeable goodness of our merciful Father in heaven, what a pleasure, what a delight would it be, either to retire by ourselves, and pour out our thankful souls to him in secret silence, or to repair to the sanctuary and there join with the multitude in expressing the grateful emotions of our feeling hearts.

MARRIED,

By the Rev. John P. Peckworth, Rev. SAMUEL HUGGENS to Miss ELIZABETH LOWNES.

By the Rev. Dr. Staughton, Rev. HOWARD MALCOM to Miss LYDIA M. SHIELDS.

By the Rev. Mr. Boyd, Mr. SAMUEL ALLINSON to Miss ELIZABETH WELSH.

DIED,

On the morning of the 3d inst in the 51st year of her age, Mrs. MARY RICHARDS, wife of Samuel Richards, esq.

On the 1st inst. SAMUEL AUSTIN, late merchant of this city, aged about 36 years.

On the 4th inst. Mrs. REBECCA O'BRYAN, wife of Benjamin O'Bryan, in the 37th year of her age.

On the 5th inst. Mrs. MARY M'CLASKEY, aged 44, wife of James M'Claskey.

On the 6th instant, Mrs. SARAH M'KEAN, consort of the late Governor Thomas M'Kean, aged 75 years. In the 39th year of age, Mrs. HANNAH MAGEE, consort of Hugh S. Magee.

POETS' CORNER.

FROM THE UNIVERSALIST MAGAZINE.

ACROSTIC.

Just, meek and lowly were thy ways
On earth: thy sentiments the same;
Heav'n blest thy labors, and thy days,
Nor do we slight thy rev'rend name.
May no far distant ages prove
Ungrateful to thy memory dear,
Recorded in these hearts of love,
Remain thy gracious maxims here.
And though thy body's low in dust,
Yet lives thy spirit with the just.

M.

PRINTING

Neatly executed at this Office.